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ABSTRACT

The methods and materials for teaching the vocabulary and writing components of an intensive summer English as a second language (ESL) program for foreign university students are described. Program goals are to improve English language proficiency and orient students to the American academic system and American culture. The approach to building vocabulary is systematic and intensive study of a core lexicon leading to vocabulary independence. Such exercises as word mazes, synonym and antonym matching, word association, and puzzles are used to help students acquire multiple shades of meaning, move words from the reading/listening to the reading/speaking vocabulary, and acquire independent learning skills that enable them to use their knowledge to decipher new words. The writing activities all consist of writing, obtaining feedback, and rewriting. The exercises include sentence combining and keeping journals. The daily schedule of activities for the 5-week course is described. (RW)

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Postsecondary ESL Methods in an Intensive Course Model

During the 1981-82 academic year, foreign student enrollment in American institutions of higher learning accounted for 2.5% of the total student population (or approximately 325,000 foreign students).[1] It has been projected that by 1990 that proportion will rise to between 500,000 and one million. In the past six years, the foreign student population in graduate and undergraduate programs at North Dakota State University has increased more than 100%, even though each year nearly one-third of all who apply for admission are turned away because of English language deficiency. Of those who do matriculate at NDSU, it has been found that over 50% of entering undergraduate international students and almost 25% of the graduate students experience difficulty with English to a degree that negatively affects their academic progress as well as their classroom and personal interactions with the native student body and the community at large. To address the problem of foreign students' marginal communication abilities in English, NDSU, three years ago, instituted its English as a Second Language intensive summer program. This paper gives a general overview of the organization of that program and offers details about methods and materials for teaching two of the course components, vocabulary and writing.

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The ESL intensive course at NDSU is specifically designed for incoming graduate and undergraduate foreign students whose TOEFL or

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Michigan Language Test scores are borderline and whose acceptance for admission to the university is conditional. Another target group is currently enrolled students whose scores meet minimum university standards but who are recommended to the course by their departments or advisers. In addition, the class is open to refugees and other newcomers with post-secondary academic backgrounds in their native countries. While its goal is broadly conceived to enhance the probability these international students will be successful in their academic pursuits and personal relationships, the intensive course has three specific objectives:

1. To significantly improve English language proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This is to be demonstrated by comparison of pre- and postcourse measurements and supported by feedback from the student participants and other faculty with whom they subsequently work.
2. To orient students to the setting and standards of the American academic system.
3. To increase participants' general knowledge of American culture and their familiarity with the history, characteristics, and customs of the local community and the region.

The ambitions of the program necessitate a team approach to teaching. Ours is a three-member team whose backgrounds are in English, FL, and ESL and whose cumulative expertise includes counseling and administration. The aggregate of specialized knowledge and skills the team presents was achieved intentionally; but another factor that has contributed to the success of the program, and one that often is as much a product of good

fortune as of planning, is the favorable chemistry that exists among the three individuals. Given the extraordinary amount of joint planning, coordination, and execution of instruction and cocurricular activities demanded by a venture of this kind, there can be little doubt that the combination of personalities and teaching styles assembled will influence the outcome of the effort.

At the beginning of the five-week summer session the team administers to participants the battery of Educational Testing Service Cooperative English Tests of reading and writing. Entry scores on the two parts of the reading test, vocabulary and comprehension, and the two parts of the writing test, effectiveness and mechanics, are analyzed along with recorded student interviews and samples of the students' writing in order to obtain a profile of strengths and weaknesses for each participant that permits the team to more closely tailor components of the program to individual needs. The interviews have been valuable not only in assessing pronunciation and fluency, but also in revealing personal information that sometimes has quite a direct bearing on students' programming. The interviews have proved useful in preventing or alleviating certain of the tensions and problems that can arise in this situation, by indicating, for example, a student's difficulty relating to women in positions of authority at the university.

Analogous to the way in which a student's program is individualized, the professional specialization of each instructor has determined that one will concentrate on the writing skills component and the two others on reading and speaking skills, focusing on vocabulary and phonetics. A

limit on student enrollment of twenty-five assures that instructional group sizes will not exceed a desirable maximum and that there will be opportunity for individual remediation.

Fundamental to the intensive course is the goal of dramatically increasing vocabulary, an emphasis that recognizes:

1. the positive correlation between vocabulary knowledge and listening or reading comprehension and efficiency, and
2. the relatively greater urgency to develop the lexicon of of the language, as opposed to teaching its structure, given the sheer number of existing vocabulary items that constitute the potential curriculum.[2]

Our approach to building vocabulary is through systematic, intensive study of a core lexicon, rather than memorizing lists of words and their definitions or learning words as isolated pieces of information. We subscribe to Deighton's view that word meanings may be treated as concepts in that they are assimilated over a period of time with repeated experience, not acquired in a single exposure.[3] Learning a new word then has to be perceived as a developmental process, and teaching it takes into account that a person's competence with a word may vary from one situation to another; that is, the term may be in the individual's listening and reading vocabulary but not in the speaking and writing vocabulary. This illustrates the need for a program of vocabulary instruction that accomplishes several things. First, it widens students' command of new words by helping them acquire knowledge of multiple meanings and shades of meaning. Second, it succeeds in moving those words from the listening/

reading vocabulary into the speaking/writing vocabulary. Third, it imparts skills to students enabling them to be independent learners.[4]

Coomber, Peet, and Glatthorn's vocabulary series WordSkill (Science Research Associates, 1979) is built on that theoretical framework and has been serving as our basic text. The ESL students have reported satisfaction with it, finding the format manageable and interesting. Another advantage offered by WordSkill is that each book in the series has been designated to correspond to a particular grade level, a feature which is helpful in establishing a starting point for a student's instruction. In deciding which words to target for study, the authors relied in large part on the work of Dale and O'Rourke, whose Living Word Vocabulary[5] relates knowledge of word meanings by grade levels of U. S. students tested in upper elementary school through college senior. They had also given consideration to the correspondence of words in the second language with words already familiar, that is, of relatively high frequency, to the learner in his or her primary language. And citing James Brown's assertion that twenty of the most common prefixes and fourteen of the most common roots will unlock over 14,000 words from a typical desk dictionary,[6] the WordSkill authors focused on teaching words that would contribute to students' vocabulary independence, in other words, would enable second-language learners to decipher additional words by virtue of their knowledge of word structure (roots, prefixes, and suffixes) and word relationships (synonyms, antonyms, context clues).

For our purposes, the target words of each unit in the text are introduced on audio tapes used in the language laboratory, which is

located adjacent to the main classroom. We had requested the assistance of the university's Speech and Drama Department in preparing the tapes, an arrangement that proved mutually beneficial. One of the principal advantages for us is that the ESL students utilizing the lab tapes are hearing good language models from native speakers in addition to their three instructors. Listening to other correct models increases the likelihood that emerging listening/speaking skills will generalize. The organization of each tape calls for a brief set of instructions to the student, then three recitations of the target word followed by pauses in which the student repeats the word, and finally the target word given in a sentence taken from the WordSkill text. The student's first written assignment is to choose from several alternatives the word or phrase that most closely matches the meaning of the target word as it has been introduced on the tape. In this method of presentation, students are afforded immediate practice in using context clues to discern meaning; thus their initial learning is accomplished inductively. Familiarity with a word is subsequently expanded through a hierarchy of learning experiences intended to develop recognition strategies, knowledge of word relationships, knowledge of multiple meanings, precision in word choice, and awareness of sociolinguistic factors governing language use.

The word maze is an example of an exercise that is appropriate in the introductory phase of vocabulary teaching to reinforce word recognition and spelling. Another activity that serves the same purpose is to have students experiment with the visual characteristics of certain words, that is, arranging the size, shape, and spacing of the letters and the

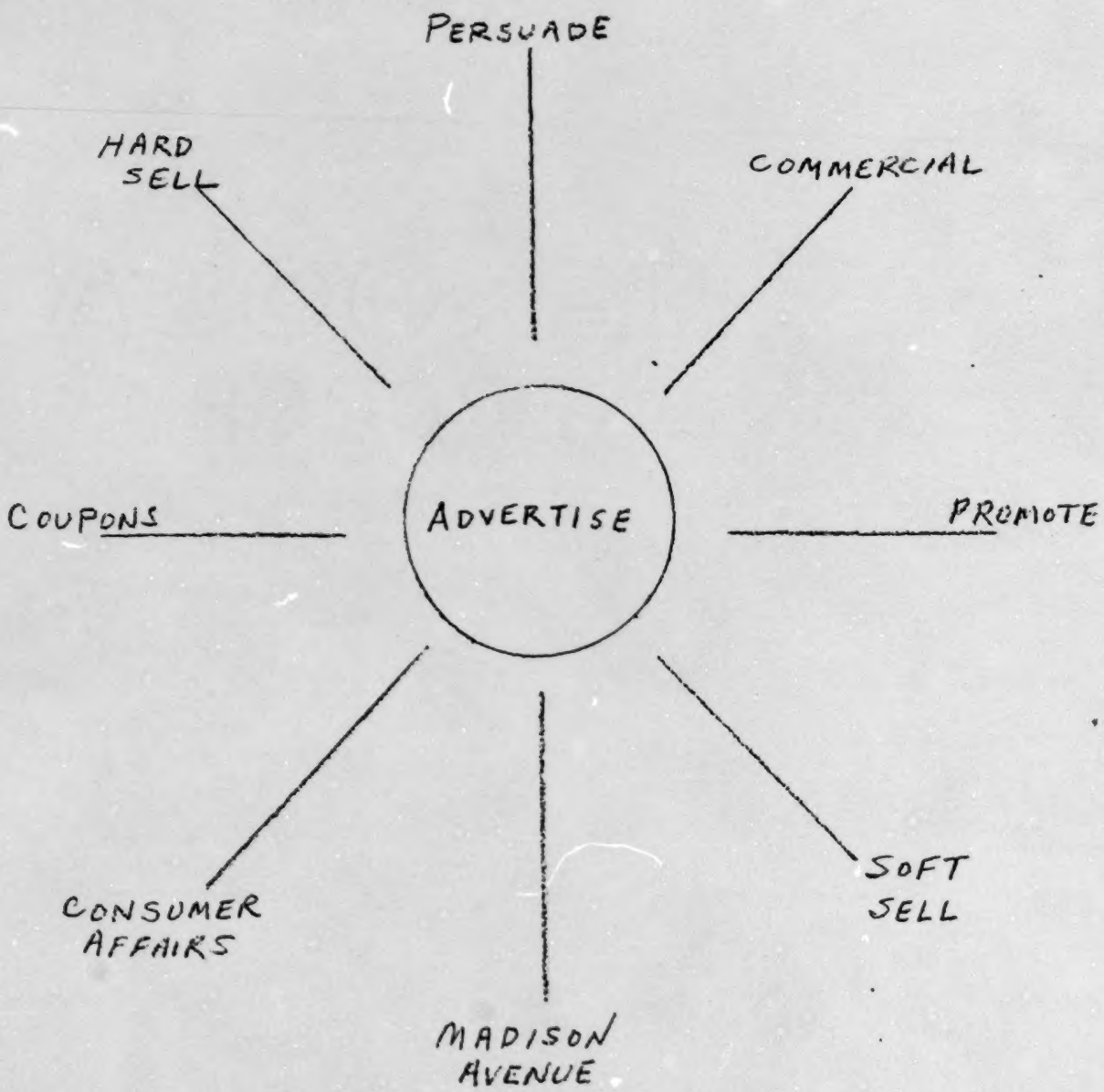
overall configuration to convey word meaning in the manner of concrete poetry.

Analogy completion and synonym or antonym matching foster acquisition of new vocabulary by showing its relationship to other known words, thereby placing the new term into a useful frame of reference. A more refined version of synonym-antonym identification is to place a given set of four or more words on a continuum with the first and last words being the most opposite in meaning. It is critical for the ESL students to understand that words are synonymous or opposite by degrees, and this kind of practice attunes students to the need for precision in word use.

Crossword puzzles have long been a mainstay of vocabulary reinforcement and stimulate growth in a number of skill areas, including thinking about words, noticing word structure and letter pattern, learning pronunciation through rhyme clues, expanding vocabulary through synonym and antonym clues, and learning to think in English through thought clues.

Another dimension of vocabulary study is becoming knowledgeable of the sociolinguistic aspects of a word; and to expand students' awareness of sociolinguistics, Professor Peet, coauthor of WordSkill, and I have developed what we refer to as a lexiographic method of vocabulary building, in which a core vocabulary item is learned in relation to a cluster of associated terms. The core item, the lexiogram, is depicted at the center of the cluster, as the hub of a wheel, and radiating from it might be synonyms, analogous terms, and notions usually connected with the lexiogram in the minds of native speakers. One way to generate a lexiograph is through a word-association technique. When working with international

students it may be necessary to suggest many or most of the "spoke" entries initially. It works best to choose culturally weighted words for the lexiogram center, value-laden terms, words to which native speakers would have a visceral or emotional reaction, such as the core word "advertise" in this example:



When vocabulary study assumes this form, a significant amount of cultural information is being transmitted. The lesson includes affective as well as cognitive content. The student's knowledge of the core item is being extended geometrically so that the word will be learned more precisely. The fact that the student must think about the relationship of the target word to each item in the cluster, and in the process will be creating mental images of some of those associations, results in retention and learning superior to simply memorizing a definition or synonyms. And the more applications of a word are learned, the greater the likelihood that a student will use the word in speaking or writing.

In designing the writing component of the intensive course, we took into account that the students who enroll have had formal training in English that minimizes or precludes the need for organized grammar review in the conventional drill/workbook exercise format. Also, many of them are already accustomed to studying from textbooks written in English and therefore are acquainted with formal exposition. However,their own writing in the second language lacks the maturity deemed appropriate for the university level in terms of vocabulary choice, sentence and paragraph construction, and rhetorical considerations. Reflecting our conviction that there is no substitute for writing to improve writing, all of the activities in this component of the course conform in essence to the pattern: write, obtain feedback, rewrite. One of these activities is practice in sentence combining, a method that might be briefly described as transforming two or more "kernel" sentences, that is, unmodified subject-verb constructions, into more complex, sophisticated sentences through the

application of procedures such as coordination, subordination, or modification. When sentence combining is done in a small group and students are able to compare their constructions, they begin to make judgments not only about the correctness or incorrectness of individual sentences but also about their relative effectiveness and the students' own stylistic preferences. Thereby, they accomplish one of the chief objectives of sentence combining practice, which is to become aware of a greater number of alternatives in written expression.

Sentence combining relies on feedback from others participating in the writing class about usage, logic, and style, information that, it is presumed, the students possess intuitively. In classes for ESL students, there tends to be a comparatively stronger reliance on the instructor for responses to students' combining efforts. Nevertheless, the basic technique of demonstrating a particular structure and having students immediately experiment with it does facilitate writing maturity, especially when the practice occurs within the context of whole pieces of writing. We have been using William Strong's Sentence Combining and Paragraph Building (Random House, 1981) as a text because so many of the combining assignments are in the form of continuous discourse. The text offers what are termed "signaled combining" exercises, in which cues direct the student to make specific transformations, and "open combining" activities, in which the student chooses from a number of stylistic options that are all technically correct. At the end of each study section are topics and suggested outlines for original writing.

Despite its strengths, the sentence combining text alone will not

constitute an instructional program in writing for ESL students and must be amply supplemented. Also, regarding the text, the instructor has to be judicious in deciding which transformations will be introduced, in what order, and to what extent each will be practiced to meet the needs of an individual or group. The most efficient way to make these determinations is by analyzing students' writing samples for the presence or absence of certain structures. In his research on teaching writing to ESL students, David Davidson has identified nine subordinating structures that appear to be characteristic of mature writing and are appropriately taught in postsecondary education. He suggests the following sequence for their instruction: prenominal adjectives; adverbs; prepositional phrases; adverb, noun, and relative clauses; participial, gerund, and infinitive phrases. The order reflects Davidson's findings about the comparative ease with which these structures are learned by ESL students and the frequency of the structures' appearance in the writing of competent American college freshmen.[7] In the intensive course the procedure of assessing student writing needs is an ongoing one, and the structures to be practiced in combining typically are gleaned from the students' own compositions.

Although the production of mechanically accurate and stylistically effective written discourse is the ultimate goal of writing instruction, the process leading to that end result is itself a worthwhile subject for study. For, by becoming knowledgeable of the process, a fluency in writing can be developed. One way to become conscious of the act of writing is to keep a journal. This is not the same as simply recording

daily happenings in a diary, although that is an acceptable way for the novice to approach journal keeping. With proper direction, however, the journal evolves into something more than a catalogue of events. Students in the intensive course are required to keep two journals, one public and one private. They are reasonably free to develop the private journal as they wish, within guidelines. It is recommended that they make at least five entries per week allowing a minimum of ten minutes per entry. The subject is for them to choose, whatever seems important on that day. They are encouraged to allow the activity to be a free-flowing one in which they write down rapidly anything that comes to mind, without censoring themselves or concerning themselves with spelling, grammar, or form. The rule is that they will control what is to be later shown to others. Writing of this kind, once initial inhibitions have abated, is often fragmentary and unstructured but, at the same time, quite expressive and honest. It is not aimed at meeting public expectations and therefore can fulfill whatever purposes the writer chooses, whether it be venting frustration, examining present or past behavior, recording in detail the sights, sounds, and emotions of an important experience, toying with a seemingly farfetched idea, entering quotations read and writing responses to them, or reconsidering something written earlier, putting it in another light or drawing from it a new significance. Although the quality of journal entries is bound to be uneven, it is just these kinds of jottings which are often the germs of full-fledged essays and poems. To make this point to students, as well as to deal with the reality that some students will not see the value of such an assignment nor be motivated to follow through with it

unless an instructor is going to look at it, the students are required to turn in a summary of either their private or their public journal for review by the instructor. They are to be selective and to add, delete, or rearrange material to result in an organized, complete piece of writing.

The habit of free writing without deliberately trying to impose order or style liberates the mind from the clichés and formulas that sub-consciously control written expression. It fosters writing agility, spontaneity and confidence, and engenders introspection and self-revelation. Nevertheless, if we want to communicate these ideas to others, we need to shape these free-formed thoughts in a way that will produce the effect we intend in a particular audience. That is the function served by the public journal. The public journal encourages experimentation with content and style, while it anticipates being read by another for whom the writer's details, clarity, coherence, structure, and rhetoric will have a direct influence on the conveyance of meaning.

Ann E. Berthoff, in describing the connection between theoretical bases and practical applications in writing instruction, refers to writing as a way of making meaning, but emphasizes that the meanings are unstable, dynamic relationships depending on the context in which they are seen and the perspective from which they are seen.[8] Journal activities teach students how to write, that is, how to improve their meaning-making in writing, by becoming attentive to their own writing process. Berthoff refers to this as "critical awareness," becoming conscious of mind activity. In the ESL course this consciousness results from students working in small groups to talk over journal entries and suggest to each

other ways of making their ideas accessible to an audience in writing. Each group member then writes a summary of his or her entries on a specific topic, supplementing and editing as necessary to thoroughly integrate the fragments. The summary is presented to the group for their impressions, and the piece is then rewritten. At that point it may be put on a ditto or transparency and offered to the class for further reactions, or it may be submitted to the instructor and discussed in an individual conference. There is no red-marking of papers, but revision, rewriting, proofreading. Each journal summary is followed up by one or more transactional writing assignments insuring progress in a logical sequence from writing about familiar events or people in a chronological narrative to writing more contrived, arbitrarily structured expositions.

The following abbreviated schedule indicates how writing and vocabulary instruction are planned on a daily basis.

8:30	News media viewing, listening, reading, e.g., "Today" show
9:00	Language laboratory: Preview and listening, e.g., National Public Radio's "Morning Edition" Small-group discussion
10:15	Writing: Sentence combining Compare/edit homework in groups of 2-4 Large-group discussion of homework solutions
11:00	WordSkill: Introduction to target words Reading comprehension Extending knowledge of word meanings Discovering related words Using words in writing and speaking
12:00	Lunch

12:45	Conversation: Prepared topics, lexiographs, phonetics
1:30	Writing: Journal discussion, summary, revision
2:45	WordSkill
3:30	Individual conferences/remediation
8:00	Evening theater performance

Typically, there are six to eight hours of instruction per day with cultural and recreational activities planned for evenings and weekends. The classroom day begins at 8:30 a.m. with attention to news. Current daily newspapers and weekly magazines are available for perusal. There are a television and radio in the classroom, and students are able to view or listen to news and information programming.

The first formal class period is an hour segment of listening laboratory work and follow-up conversational groups in the traditional mode of FL instruction. A nationally broadcast news and public affairs radio program is recorded in early morning; and, by class time, an edited version is ready for laboratory listening. Prior to the listening activity, students are provided a preview of key vocabulary and topics to be covered on the tape. This feature has proved to be an excellent warmup for the rest of the day. It is highly motivational in that there is fresh material every day of immediate interest. News on domestic and foreign affairs has relevance and, in some instances, urgency for the students' lives. They are also able to obtain information on the cultural front and keep abreast of what is happening regionally and locally. The vocabulary and content in the broadcast will undoubtedly be pertinent to

conversations held outside class. And the news stories or features that run for a period of several days or longer offer built-in vocabulary review.

The afternoon conversation session is for small groups. Individualized phonetics practice is also conducted during this time. The Department of Speech Pathology has been an invaluable resource for us, supplying information on the theory of sound formation and recommending pronunciation exercises. To get group conversations started, students might have to be prepared to talk about a book of interest, or, another day, to spontaneously discuss their opinions and knowledge on a broad topic, such as "hobbies," using a list of key words as a catalyst. The criterion for success in conversation is, "How well do the other students understand what I am saying?"

On an almost daily basis, participants informally evaluate the course by completing statements like: "I need more of _____; I want less _____; I have a problem with _____." The response form is deliberately open-ended, and it has been no surprise that the needs expressed range from academic to personal. The ESL instructors have been the first line of defense and strongest support network for their students in dealing with advisers, department heads, landlords, and immigration authorities; in cutting through bureaucratic red tape; and in attempting to cope with an entire spectrum of life adjustments. Long after completing the intensive program, students stop in to visit their instructors, usually bringing with them a hidden agenda of practical problems and academic concerns.

To determine just how effective the summer intensive course has been in reaching its stated objectives, especially improving linguistic proficiency,

we refer to several gauges. One measure is afforded by formal and informal testing. Also, upon finishing, there is a comprehensive assessment by the students themselves which speaks to the conduct of the course and the students' views of their own progress. The course is taken on a pass/fail basis, but those passing receive a certificate of satisfactory completion. A letter is also sent to the student's adviser with a copy to the Director of International Student Affairs stating the participant's advancement in each of the four language skills as being exceptional, adequate, or marginal. During the succeeding academic year, the ESL Coordinator follows up on the student's performance through contact with advisers and with English instructors in composition courses. One of the indicators, the norm-referenced testing done upon students' entry and exit of the program, gives mixed readings of success. Despite the fact that participants in the intensive course have registered substantial gains in the results of the ETS Cooperative English Tests, their exit scores as a group still fall below those of approximately 75% of all incoming U. S. college freshmen. Our experience at NDSU has led us to conclude that the intensive summer course in ESL fills an urgent need and does so efficiently. Nevertheless, the fact that international students continue to lag behind their American counterparts in critical communication abilities strongly suggests that other options, one possibility being a full-year program, be pursued in an effort to better serve this growing university clientele.

Notes

[1] "Foreign Students in U. S. Rise," New York Times, 24 Oct. 1982.

[2] See Elliot L. Judd, "Vocabulary Teaching and TESOL: A Need for Reevaluation of Existing Assumptions," TESOL Quarterly, 12 (March, 1978), 71.

[3] Lee C. Deighton, "Developing Vocabulary: Another Look at the Problem," English Journal, 49 (October,1960), 86.

[4] See James E. Coomber and Howard D. Peet, "Vocabulary in ESL," New Journal of Approaches to Language Arts, 5 (1981), 2-3.

[5] Edgar Dale and Joseph O'Rourke, The Living Word Vocabulary (Palo Alto: Field Enterprises, 1971).

[6] James Brown, Programmed Vocabulary, 3rd Edition (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1980).

[7] David Davidson, "Assessing Writing Ability of ESL College Freshmen," Resources in Education, (July, 1977).

[8] Ann E. Berthoff, "A Curious Triangle and the Double-Entry Notebook; or, How Theory Can Help Us Teach Reading and Writing," Focus: Teaching English Language Arts. (Winter, 1981), 42-43.